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SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF MUTHANNA GOVERNOR'S ASSASSINATION

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2783

¶B. BAGHDAD 2816

¶C. BAGHDAD 2821

¶D. BAGHDAD 2900

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (U) This is a PRT Muthanna reporting cable.

¶12. (S/REL MNF-I) Summary: It is not yet known who is responsible for the assassination of Muthanna Governor Hassani. Members of his Jalabtah branch of the Albu Hassan tribe have taken tribal retribution, but the violence has been constrained by the intervention of provincial leaders and ISCI/Badr national politicians. The widespread perception that JAM is responsible for Hassani's murder has taken on a reality of its own, and rumors are swirling that both JAM and Badr are gearing up all over the south for a fight. This tinderbox could be touched off by local events that have little to do with the larger struggle. End Summary.

Clues About the Assassins

¶13. (C/REL MNF-I) Eyewitness accounts of the attack, as well as analysis of the attack site and the destroyed vehicle, indicate that Governor Hassani's assassins were reasonably sophisticated and had done thorough planning on how best to strike. Triple Canopy intelligence analysts working for the PRT judged the bomb to have been an unusually large conventional charge and not an EFP. The attackers emplaced the IED along a stretch of road between a railroad crossing and culvert, where Hassani's convoy was forced to travel slowly and in single file. This allowed the attacker to time his command detonation of the explosive so that it hit the vehicle with maximum force where Hassani was riding behind the driver. The attack occurred in an area controlled by the Governor's Jalabtah branch of the Albu Hassan tribe. Rumaytha locals believe that no stranger to the area could have emplaced or detonated the IED without being noticed by Jalabtah members. The implication is that a Jalabtah member was one of the conspirators.

Many Arrested, But Only One of Them a Suspect

¶14. (S/REL MNF-I) The Criminal Intelligence Unit (CIU) police have arrested one main suspect so far, a JAM hardliner from Rumaytha named Rasul Abdul Amir, who has allegedly confessed to detonating the IED, but the police have yet to air the purported videotape of his confession. From 25-28 August, police also arrested a host of low-level JAM operatives wanted for other incidents, and some known Sadr supporters without clear militia ties, who do not appear to have been involved in the assassination, but for whom the event serves as justification for a crackdown. Another common denominator is that those arrested all lack strong tribal backing. Police have not pursued well-known senior

JAM leaders in Samawa or Rumaytha. In particular, they have avoided Abu Kareem (Jalayl branch of the Albu Hassan tribe) and Haleem (Albu Einayn branch of the Albu Hassan tribe), despite unofficially suspecting them of involvement. This suspicion stems from two instances in which Abu Kareem and Haleem threatened Hassani that if the Governor did not cease authorizing police crackdowns on JAM, Hassani would "pay the price." Police inaction appears to be due to fears of major retaliation from both JAM and the Jalayl and Albu Einayn sub-tribes. Overall, the police investigation has been cursory, neglecting even to interview eyewitnesses. The most likely reason for this is fear of unearthing more serious tribal complicity among the strongest tribes in Rumaytha and provoking retaliation when their members are arrested.

Revenge in Muthanna: Fallout From the Attack

¶5. (S/REL MNF-I) The involvement of the Muthanna police and the national government in conducting the investigation has curbed the scope of the customary tribal retribution by Hassani's relatives. Immediately after the attack, provincial officials and sheikhs of the neighboring Bani Zraige tribe persuaded those of Jalabtah to stay their hand before seeking revenge and instead allow government channels to dispense justice. At the funeral of Hassani two days later, 22 August, Badr commander Hadi al-Amiri argued with the more aggressive members of the Jalabtah and Badr that direct, tribal vengeance did not serve their interests. He assured those present that the Badr/ISCI leadership in Baghdad rated the governor's murder as the most important issue confronting them, and that they were making preparations to address it "according to the law." He warned the tribesmen not to "mess it (these plans) up" through rash

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action.

¶6. (C/REL MNF-I) These warnings, while not entirely heeded by the Jalabtah tribesmen and Hassani's next of kin, have circumscribed their acts of retaliation. The night following the governor's death, one of Hassani's brothers, Mohsin "Sitcha", led a collection of cousins and Jalabtah young men into the Shuhada neighborhood of Rumaytha and burned down Rasul's house. The armed band prohibited the fire department from acting, but requested that they stay on call to prevent the blaze from spreading. They also briefly attacked the Sadrists Medina mosque, before storming through a number of tents for pilgrims lining the main street that bore Muqtada's picture.

¶7. (C/REL MNF-I) On the night of the 21st, the same armed tribesmen burned the house of Sayyid Muhsin Al-Shara', a well-known Sadrists in Rumaytha who led the social affairs department of OMS. Shara' had been a participant in Baha al-Araji's most recent visit to Muthanna for negotiations concerning ISF-JAM confrontations in Rumaytha. On Saturday 25 August at 3 a.m., Mohsin and the tribesmen attacked the OMS building in Khidr. Driving in tinted police vehicles but wearing civilian clothes, they were waved through multiple police checkpoints. Upon arrival, they doused the OMS building with gasoline and then opened fire on it with grenades, PKCs, and AK-47s.

¶8. (C/REL MNF-I) Finally, later on the 25th, Mohsin's gang burned to the ground a 160m ID department store owned by well-known Sadrists supporter Haji Mashkour al-Khazali of Rumaytha. The cost of the damage, along with the fact that it targeted a well-respected figure in the community from the powerful Khaza'il tribe, was too much for the tribes around Rumaytha. An emergency tribal council meeting was held on 26 August, in which the sheikhs decided to cordon off the city of Rumaytha from further violence. The implication was that attacks on the property of Sadrists without strong tribal backing were tolerable, but acts that might provoke retaliation from powerful tribes and escalate the conflict

were not. The catalogue of violence above may not appear restrained at first glance, but the most telling fact is that no one has been killed since Hassani's assassination.

So Who Killed Hassani?

¶9. (S/REL MNF-I) COMMENT: None of the culprits have been identified with certainty. Rasul may indeed have been the trigger man, but he could not have carried out the attack without sophisticated accomplices. There is a chance that Hassani,s murder was a tribal affair. However, conventional wisdom in the community is that JAM is responsible, and we judge that to be most likely, albeit with the probable aid of someone within the Jalabtah sub-tribe. The sophistication of the attack suggests the involvement of a JAM Special Group. If that were the case, it is likely that the order for the attack came from Muqtada,s inner circle in Najaf or from Iran.

¶10. (S/REL MNF-I) COMMENT CONT.: Irrespective of who actually committed Hassani,s murder, the widespread belief that JAM assassinated two Badr governors in ten days has taken on a reality of its own. Whether Muqtada authorized the operation or not, Badr/ISCI is holding JAM responsible and JAM is preparing to defend itself. The street is awash with rumors of JAM and Badr commanders throughout southern Iraq receiving orders to stockpile weapons, ammunition and food in preparation for major clashes that could break out at any point. END COMMENT.

CROCKER